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Iranian Women's Experiences of Spousal Abuse

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the Iranian women's experiences of spousal abuse. The study followed a qualitative and phenomenological research design. 23 Iranian women age-ranged between 17 and 58 formed the sample population of the research. The seven-step Colaizzi procedure was applied for data analysis. The following 5 main themes were developed. The first main theme was deprivation; the second main theme was humiliation; the third main theme was forgotten love; the fourth main theme was assault; and the fifth main theme was patriarchy. All these five themes represented the women's life experiences of spousal abuse.

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1. Introduction

Violence is regarded as an intentional behavior which aims at hurting oneself or the others (Mirzaee & Kamrani, 2008). Defining different types of violence including family and social violence, domestic violence is a serious social damage which still shows off in the society despite all the cultural advancements (Payne & Wermeling, 2009).

The most amount of domestic violence is against women. Violence against women is a phenomenon in which the women are forced to do what they are told to and her rights are abused by their husbands just due to their gender (Shams, Emamipour & Sadralasadat, 2012). According to the reports by World Health Organization (WHO),

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violence against women is a universal phenomenon and has crossed over the borders of culture, social and economic classes, education, ethnicity, and age. The previous studies indicated that 30-35% of the American women are physically hurt by their husbands and more than 3.5 million women are badly behaved by their spouses per year; moreover, 50% of them are the victims of violence in their life in other ways. The amount of spousal abuse against women have been reported to be 34% in Egypt, 45% in Ethiopia, 31% in Nigeria, 13% in South Africa, 40% in Mexico, 29% in Canada, 58% in Turkey, and 20% in Thailand (WHO, 2013).

The reports of General Principles of European Union agency for fundamental rights (FRA), showed that the amount of spousal abuse in the countries of European Community ranged from 13% to 32% in 2014 (European Union agency for fundamental rights, 2014).

Violence against women is a social dilemma in Iran as well as other countries (Khorasani. 2010); however, there is no valid statistics available about violence against women. The primary findings concerning the amount of physical violence against the women among those who have referred to the forensic centers demonstrate that these women are mostly villagers and their level of educational attainment is primary school or lower. With respect to their jobs, most of them are housewives; further, their husbands are villagers, too, and their level of educational attainment is guidance school or lower. They are mostly involved in agriculture (Gramizadegan & Behboodi, 2013).

Although women can be violent against men, as well, the results of different studies show that women rather than men are more exposed to violence by their spouses. Of the types of violence, physical violence or assault and battery is one of the most common types of misbehavior towards women and girls throughout the world (Keeling & Wormer, 2012). It is rooted in the men's beliefs about the possession of the woman's body, their work strength and carte blanche. Likewise, it is a medium which men apply to take women under their own control; they even consider it as a lawful task (Dekeseredy, 2011).

Men's violence against women has various dimensions, of which, physical violence (hurting parts of the body, beating, and assault and battery), psychic violence (threat, humiliation, verbal blame, and obscenity), social violence (controlling the woman's behaviors, making her socially isolated, banning communicating with others), and sexual violence can be pointed out (Narimani & Valizadeh, 2011).

As per the reports presented by the World Bank, rape and domestic violence, more than such diseases as breast cancer, painful deliveries, and accidents; on the one hand, cause the health of women 15-44 years of age to be ruined; and on the other hand, violence against women has negative effects on other important health preferences including mother's health and immunity, planned parenthood, prevention of sexually-transmitted diseases, AIDS, and mental health (Morgan & Chadwick, 2009).

Of other consequences of this cultural, social, and health problem, negative social outcomes such as increase of health-care costs resulted from women's catching physical and mental diseases due to violence as well as decrease of women's mileage and work strength can be mentioned (Barnett & Miller-Perrin, 2011).

Although several quantitative studies have been conducted concerning men's spousal abuse and violence against women, it seems that not many studies have been carried out in terms of the women's life experiences of spousal abuse. Comprehension of the individuals' experiences makes us be able to see the world the same as the people whose experiences we have investigated see (Boswell & Cannon, 2014). Such comprehension will lead to the production of science and will help us actually understand the real worries of women who have experienced family violence as well as the spousal abuse phenomenon (Morgaine, 2011). Thus, the present research aims at recognizing and describing Iranian women's experiences of spousal abuse.

2. Methodology

This study was conducted following a qualitative research design. A qualitative research following a systematic and conceptual procedure is carried out to describe the life experiences and comprehension of their meanings (Boswell & Cannon, 2014). Polit and Beck (2014) hold that phenomenology investigates the experiences of people. A researcher who carries out phenomenological studies believes that there exist entities in life phenomena and experiences which can be comprehended and explored. Such researchers investigate the conceptual phenomena since the substantial entity of the realities exist in them covertly.

The sample population of the current study was composed of all Iranian women who have experienced spousal abuse. Sampling procedure was a purposive one and the participants were selected from the women who were

interested and thus voluntarily participated in the study. In addition, they had the capability to describe their experiences. If the participants did not want to cooperate anymore and intended to give up the project, they were excluded from it. The participants were selected from the women who referred to a center for family consultation as well as a psychiatric ward of a hospital. During sampling, it was not required to specify the number of the participants; hence, the sampling continued until the saturation of the data, so that the new participants did not have anything new to present (LoBiondo – Wood & Heber, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2014).

After the participants were selected, they were sufficiently informed of the nature and objectives of the project. Then, they individually signed the consent forms, declaring their consent of participating in this study. Deep and unstructured interviews were applied to collect the required data.

Before the interviews started, permission was obtained from the participants for recording the interviews and they were assured that their information would be kept confidential. The time period allocated for the interviews ranged between 40-60 minutes based on the participants' patience and tolerance. Validity and reliability of the present research study were rooted in the four axes of real value, practicality, continuance, and being based on reality (Boswell & Cannon, 2014).

The seven-step Colaizzi procedure was applied to analyze the data obtained. First, the interviews recorded were exactly listened to several times and were transcribed word by word. The content of the interviews were precisely studied and the significant expressions were extracted. The codes obtained from the primary analysis of the data were classified in terms of the concepts obtained from them. In the next stage, the results in the form of a complete description of the phenomenon under study were combined and more general concepts were achieved in a way that they were totally representing the respective experiences (the sub-themes). Eventually, the main themes of the Iranian women's experiences of spousal abuse were attained by classifying and integrating the sub-themes resulted from the study (Polit & Beck, 2008).

3. Results

Twenty-three women age-ranged between 17 and 58 participated in the current study. Regarding the participants' marital status, 16 women were married, 5 women were divorced, and 2 women were separated. As far as the level of educational attainment was concerned, 12 had high school education, 6 had primary school education, and 5 had university education.

After analyzing the transcriptions of the interviews, the Iranian women's experiences of spousal abuse were defined in 209 conceptual codes and the following 19 main sub-themes were extracted: extremist inattention, constant control, strictness, morbid jealousy, hatred, pessimism, permanent distrust, sexual negligence, humiliation, insulting, verbal aggression, accusation, compulsion, assault and battery, sexual misbehavior, egoism, proud, pertinacity, forced consortium (forced sexual intercourse), permanent dominance. These sub-themes were classified under 5 main themes of deprivation, forgotten love, humiliation, assault, and patriarchy.

3.1 Deprivation

This theme was extracted from integrating three sub-themes of extremist inattention, constant control, and strictness. Most of the participants expressed that, on the one hand, their husbands did not pay attention to them, their behaviors were under constant control of their husbands, and on the other hand, they were deprived of many of their natural rights. They declared that their wants were ignored by their husbands in the family.

Participant no. 1 said, "I'm scared to express the least wants I have. When I compare myself with other women, I see how unlucky I have been; but I have needs, too, and I also want to live like others."

Participant no. 21 said, "My husband says that I have to live either with him or with my friends. Since I got married, I haven't been in contact with my friends. Whenever I want to set an appointment with them, my husband disagrees. I have lost my friends; they make fun of me and tell me why you are so obedient to your spouse."

3.2 *Forgotten Love*

Integrating the sub-themes of morbid jealousy, hatred, pessimism, permanent distrust, and sexual negligence resulted in this theme. Many of the participants asserted that since they have some characteristics that their husbands are deprived of, they are jealous of them; and thus reveal that jealousy through aggression and sometime assault. Most of them claimed that their husbands' behavior was totally contradictory to their behavior at the beginning of their marriage or their engagement period and now their husbands ignore them.

Participant no. 9 said, "Most of the times, my husband gets home late and says that he was at work and goes to bed soon, too. I don't feel the very love in him anymore. I myself know that the period has started that our relationships go cold. I have frequently showed my interest to him by wearing beautiful dresses at home, wearing perfume and make-up, but he hasn't paid any attention to me."

Participant no. 14 said, "My husband is not like before anymore. At the beginning of our marriage, we had a very good feeling towards each other, but he is very pessimistic about me, now. He reproaches me for everything and asks me questions; for instance, "To whom did you call? Who called you? Where are you going? Where were you? Now, he pessimistically looks at whatever behavior I have. The previous trust between us has disappeared. To be honest, I also don't have trust in him anymore."

3.3 *Humiliation*

It was elicited from integrating the sub-themes of insulting, verbal aggression, and accusation. In this study, all the women who declared their experiences of spousal abuse considered insulting and verbal aggression as the common behaviors of their husbands.

Participant no. 21 said, "When we go to a party together, my husband regularly condescends other women's capabilities to me. God forbid, I make a mistake in domestic chores; wherever we go, he echoes them. I've got nervous of him."

Participant no. 5 said, "In fact, you can find swearing in whatever he says. As soon as he gets home, he swears at everything. He swears at me and my family again and again. When he is at home and wants something, he asks it by swearing. I don't know how long I should tolerate. I haven't heard good words from him."

3.4 *Assault*

This theme was abstracted from integrating the sub-themes of compulsion, assault and battery and sexual misbehavior. It describes such men's behaviors towards their wives, which are imperative and forceful. Many of the participants declared their experiences of compulsion as an obligation to compliance and obedience to their husbands; while some others pointed out the assault and physical hurt. Moreover, certain participants stated that when they were engaged in sexual behavior, they should be absolutely obedient to their husbands and they did not consider their wives' conditions.

Participant no. 17 said, "I shouldn't disagree with anything. It's him who is always talking and says the last word, and he is insisting on what he is saying. He doesn't think that I am a human being, too. If I disagree with him, he starts beating. We often get into beating due to worthless issues. He insists on his own ideas."

Participant no. 9 said, "My husband now and again has unreasonable expectations which must be absolutely done. He doesn't think about my conditions at all, that I'm tired and any energy hasn't remained for me because of working. I must definitely fulfill his desires, but it's not important for him in what situations I am." (The participant is pointing to the compulsion in the sexual activity.)

3.5 *Patriarchy*

The sub-themes of egoism, proud, pertinacity, and permanent dominance formed the structure of this theme. Indeed, the concepts which point out to the experiences of selfishness, arrogance, superiority complex, condescension, and superiority preservation. Most of the participants held that their spouses had the tendency towards showing that they were in whatever way superior to their wives and were rigid in decision making.

Participant no. 8 said, “When we go somewhere, he should always go ahead and I should follow him. When we go shopping, his own taste is more important and he doesn’t care for my opinion. It’s the same at home; he watches the very TV channel that he is interested in and it doesn’t matter for him what my interest is. You know, such behavior is very selfish.”

Participant no. 14 said, “I myself always care about him, because after all, he is a man. He goes to work and gets tired. I told myself, “Let’s listen to him so that it makes him refresh. I thought that a woman should be obedient to his husband; otherwise, life can’t go on. However, we couldn’t get along with each other and we finally got separated.”

4. Discussion

Violence against women and hurting the spouses aim at controlling and dominating them. Spousal abuse does not have only physical dimension; but its psychic and social dimensions seem to be more prevalent and prominent (Narimani & Valizadeh, 2011).

Also, in the current project, of the issues experienced by women under spousal abuse, the psychic and social aspects were more prominent than the physical aspects; so that deprivation, forgotten love, humiliation, and patriarchy were of abstracted themes which pointed to the psychic and social dimensions of spousal abuse. In this respect, Mirzaee and Kamrani (2008) maintained that the emergence of spousal abuse in Isfahan, Iran was 24% and most cases of spousal abuse included not being allowed to leave home alone, sulking in time of sadness, humiliation, and blame.

Women’s deprivation of their indisputable rights by their spouses was described in different ways. Extremist strictness and putting the spouse under control so that she was obliged to get permission from her husband to do anything, inattention and sulking, not paying attention to her social needs such as meeting parents and friends, depriving her of recreation and entertainment, not travelling, and avoiding buying the necessities were all representations of the deprivations caused by their husbands (Aghakhanie, 2012).

Forgotten love was an indicative of the experiences through which the women declared that their husbands behaved unkindly towards them and did not love them the same as the beginning of their marriages. Some of the women, due to having preferences including economic and social status, are envied by their husbands and such envy is emerged through offensive and aggressive behavior. Hatred, pessimism, distrust, and sexual indifference represent a type of behavior which is related to the comedown of the happy time of the beginning of the marriage. Currently, love and affection are replaced by distance and inattention (McGarry & Simpson, 2011). Nonetheless, misbehavior towards women is not only limited to distance and inattention, but also it occasionally precedes extremist behavior such as insulting, verbal aggression, and even accusation; that is, a kind of behavior indicative of doubt and suspicion towards women. In such a circumstance, any behavior of the wife might be interpreted differently. However, misbehavior and hurting women by their spouses not only have psychic-social aspects but also in most cases they emerge as assault and battery and even sexual misbehavior. In fact, such types of behavior can be based in the spouses’ patriarchic attitude, which itself is rooted in their selfishness, obstinacy, and trying to preserving the dominance over their wives. Indeed, the relations among the five abstracted themes of the present study can be illustrated in Figure 1.

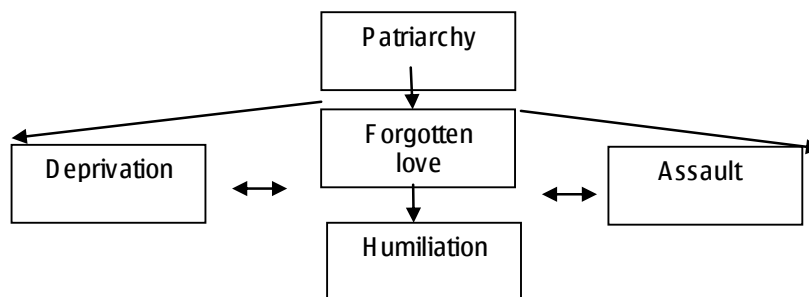


Figure 1. The relationship of women’s experiences of spousal abuse

5. Suggestions

Concerning the results obtained from women's experiences of spousal abuse and the description of its diverse dimensions and also considering the motto of the World Health Organization (WHO) based on emphasizing on the health of susceptible peoples such as women having experienced violence, providing social support for the women against their spouses' violence including constructing secure and supportive places, development of family consultation centers, approval and enforcement of laws to support women, investigating the causes and social and economic factors involved in the emergence of domestic violence and eliminating those factors, making women aware of their legal rights in the family and rectifying the social culture in terms of reducing gender discrimination can be effective in the reduction of this social problem (WHO, 2010). Conducting more widespread and more comprehensive research in this respect seems essential.

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